THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Government have seen Chinese media reports stating that the Qinghai-Tibet railway is expected to be further extended from Lhasa to Xigaze. These reports also state that the construction of this 254-kilometres long rail section is expected to be completed by 2010.

(b) Government keep a constant watch on all developments having a bearing on India's security and takes all necessary measures to safeguard it.

Visa for persons from Pakistan

504. SHRI TARLOCHAN SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of persons of Pakistan that have been granted visa to visit India during the last three years, profession-wise; and

(b) the number of Indians that have been given visa during last three years to visit Pakistan profession-wise?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Visas are granted according to purpose of visit and not profession-wise. Total number of visas issued to Pakistani nationals by High Commission of India, Islamabad during the last three years is as follows:

2004 - 60230

2005 - 88990

2006 - 87512

Information about total number of visas issued to Pakistani nationals by other Indian Missions/Posts abroad during the last three years is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House as soon as available.

(b) Visas to Indians for visiting Pakistan are granted by the Missions/Posts of Pakistan located in India or abroad. Information on number of Indians visiting Pakistan is, therefore, not available with the Government.

New norms for passports

505. SHRI M.V.MYSURA REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of new norms fixed by Government for issuing passports to the Indians in the country;

(b) the minimum/maximum time-limit for issuing passports to the persons who have applied; and

(c) the steps that are being taken by Government to avoid queues at the regional passport offices in the country?